

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord —Year C

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion-C

At the procession with palms - Gospel

Luke 19:28-40

Jesus proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem.
As he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany
at the place called the Mount of Olives,
he sent two of his disciples.
He said, "Go into the village opposite you,
and as you enter it you will find a colt tethered
on which no one has ever sat.
Untie it and bring it here.
And if anyone should ask you,
'Why are you untying it?'
you will answer,
'The Master has need of it.'"
So those who had been sent went off
and found everything just as he had told them.
And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them,
"Why are you untying this colt?"
They answered,
"The Master has need of it."
So they brought it to Jesus,
threw their cloaks over the colt,
and helped Jesus to mount.
As he rode along,
the people were spreading their cloaks on the road;
and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives,
the whole multitude of his disciples
began to praise God aloud with joy
for all the mighty deeds they had seen.
They proclaimed:
"Blessed is the king who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Peace in heaven
and glory in the highest."
Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him,
"Teacher, rebuke your disciples."
He said in reply,
"I tell you, if they keep silent,
the stones will cry out!"

Reading I

Isaiah 50:4-7

The Lord GOD has given me
a well-trained tongue,
that I might know how to speak to the weary
a word that will rouse them.
Morning after morning
he opens my ear that I may hear;
and I have not rebelled,
have not turned back.
I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield
from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help,
therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24.

R. (2a) My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

All who see me scoff at me;
they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads:
"He relied on the LORD; let him deliver him,
let him rescue him, if he loves him."

R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Indeed, many dogs surround me,
a pack of evildoers closes in upon me;
They have pierced my hands and my feet;
I can count all my bones.
R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

They divide my garments among them,
and for my vesture they cast lots.
But you, O LORD, be not far from me;
O my help, hasten to aid me.
R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

I will proclaim your name to my brethren;
in the midst of the assembly I will praise you:
"You who fear the LORD, praise him;
all you descendants of Jacob, give glory to him;
revere him, all you descendants of Israel!"
R. My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

Reading 2

Philippians 2:6-11

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, he emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
coming in human likeness;
and found human in appearance,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name
which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that
Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Verse Before the Gospel

Philippians 2:8-9

Christ became obedient to the point of death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this, God greatly exalted him
and bestowed on him the name which is above every name.

Gospel

Luke 22:14—23:56

When the hour came,
Jesus took his place at table with the apostles.
He said to them,
"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,
for, I tell you, I shall not eat it again
until there is fulfillment in the kingdom of God."
Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said,
"Take this and share it among yourselves;
for I tell you that from this time on
I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine
until the kingdom of God comes."
Then he took the bread, said the blessing,
broke it, and gave it to them, saying,
"This is my body, which will be given for you;
do this in memory of me."
And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
which will be shed for you.

"And yet behold, the hand of the one who is to betray me
is with me on the table;
for the Son of Man indeed goes as it has been determined;
but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed."
And they began to debate among themselves
who among them would do such a deed.

Then an argument broke out among them
about which of them should be regarded as the greatest.
He said to them,
"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them
and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors';
but among you it shall not be so.
Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest,
and the leader as the servant.
For who is greater:
the one seated at table or the one who serves?
Is it not the one seated at table?
I am among you as the one who serves.
It is you who have stood by me in my trials;
and I confer a kingdom on you,
just as my Father has conferred one on me,
that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom;
and you will sit on thrones
judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded
to sift all of you like wheat,
but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail;
and once you have turned back,
you must strengthen your brothers."

He said to him,
"Lord, I am prepared to go to prison and to die with you."
But he replied,
"I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows this day,
you will deny three times that you know me."

He said to them,
"When I sent you forth without a money bag or a sack or sandals,
were you in need of anything?"
"No, nothing," they replied.
He said to them,
"But now one who has a money bag should take it,
and likewise a sack,
and one who does not have a sword
should sell his cloak and buy one.
For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me,
namely, *He was counted among the wicked*;
and indeed what is written about me is coming to fulfillment."
Then they said,
"Lord, look, there are two swords here."
But he replied, "It is enough!"

Then going out, he went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives,
and the disciples followed him.
When he arrived at the place he said to them,
"Pray that you may not undergo the test."
After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling,
he prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing,
take this cup away from me;
still, not my will but yours be done."
And to strengthen him an angel from heaven appeared to him.
He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently
that his sweat became like drops of blood
falling on the ground.
When he rose from prayer and returned to his disciples,
he found them sleeping from grief.
He said to them, "Why are you sleeping?
Get up and pray that you may not undergo the test."

While he was still speaking, a crowd approached
and in front was one of the Twelve, a man named Judas.
He went up to Jesus to kiss him.
Jesus said to him,
"Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"
His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked,
"Lord, shall we strike with a sword?"
And one of them struck the high priest's servant
and cut off his right ear.
But Jesus said in reply,
"Stop, no more of this!"
Then he touched the servant's ear and healed him.
And Jesus said to the chief priests and temple guards
and elders who had come for him,
"Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?

Day after day I was with you in the temple area,
and you did not seize me;
but this is your hour, the time for the power of darkness."

After arresting him they led him away
and took him into the house of the high priest;
Peter was following at a distance.
They lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it,
and Peter sat down with them.
When a maid saw him seated in the light,
she looked intently at him and said,
"This man too was with him."
But he denied it saying,
"Woman, I do not know him."
A short while later someone else saw him and said,
"You too are one of them";
but Peter answered, "My friend, I am not."
About an hour later, still another insisted,
"Assuredly, this man too was with him,
for he also is a Galilean."
But Peter said,
"My friend, I do not know what you are talking about."
Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed,
and the Lord turned and looked at Peter;
and Peter remembered the word of the Lord,
how he had said to him,
"Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times."
He went out and began to weep bitterly.
The men who held Jesus in custody were ridiculing and beating him.
They blindfolded him and questioned him, saying,
"Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?"
And they reviled him in saying many other things against him.

When day came the council of elders of the people met,
both chief priests and scribes,
and they brought him before their Sanhedrin.
They said, "If you are the Christ, tell us, "
but he replied to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe,
and if I question, you will not respond.
But from this time on the Son of Man will be seated
at the right hand of the power of God."
They all asked, "Are you then the Son of God?"
He replied to them, "You say that I am."
Then they said, "What further need have we for testimony?
We have heard it from his own mouth."

Then the whole assembly of them arose and brought him before Pilate.
They brought charges against him, saying,
"We found this man misleading our people;
he opposes the payment of taxes to Caesar
and maintains that he is the Christ, a king."
Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"
He said to him in reply, "You say so."
Pilate then addressed the chief priests and the crowds,
"I find this man not guilty."
But they were adamant and said,

"He is inciting the people with his teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to here."

On hearing this Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean;
and upon learning that he was under Herod's jurisdiction,
he sent him to Herod who was in Jerusalem at that time.
Herod was very glad to see Jesus;
he had been wanting to see him for a long time,
for he had heard about him
and had been hoping to see him perform some sign.
He questioned him at length,
but he gave him no answer.
The chief priests and scribes, meanwhile,
stood by accusing him harshly.
Herod and his soldiers treated him contemptuously and mocked him,
and after clothing him in resplendent garb,
he sent him back to Pilate.
Herod and Pilate became friends that very day,
even though they had been enemies formerly.
Pilate then summoned the chief priests, the rulers, and the people
and said to them, "You brought this man to me
and accused him of inciting the people to revolt.
I have conducted my investigation in your presence
and have not found this man guilty
of the charges you have brought against him,
nor did Herod, for he sent him back to us.
So no capital crime has been committed by him.
Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him."

But all together they shouted out,
"Away with this man!
Release Barabbas to us."
— Now Barabbas had been imprisoned for a rebellion
that had taken place in the city and for murder. —
Again, Pilate addressed them, still wishing to release Jesus,
but they continued their shouting,
"Crucify him! Crucify him!"
Pilate addressed them a third time,
"What evil has this man done?
I found him guilty of no capital crime.
Therefore I shall have him flogged and then release him."
With loud shouts, however,
they persisted in calling for his crucifixion,
and their voices prevailed.
The verdict of Pilate was that their demand should be granted.
So he released the man who had been imprisoned
for rebellion and murder, for whom they asked,
and he handed Jesus over to them to deal with as they wished.

As they led him away
they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian,
who was coming in from the country;
and after laying the cross on him,
they made him carry it behind Jesus.
A large crowd of people followed Jesus,
including many women who mourned and lamented him.

Jesus turned to them and said,
"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me;
weep instead for yourselves and for your children
for indeed, the days are coming when people will say,
'Blessed are the barren,
the wombs that never bore
and the breasts that never nursed.'
At that time people will say to the mountains,
'Fall upon us!'
and to the hills, 'Cover us!'
for if these things are done when the wood is green
what will happen when it is dry?"
Now two others, both criminals,
were led away with him to be executed.

When they came to the place called the Skull,
they crucified him and the criminals there,
one on his right, the other on his left.
Then Jesus said,
"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."
They divided his garments by casting lots.
The people stood by and watched;
the rulers, meanwhile, sneered at him and said,
"He saved others, let him save himself
if he is the chosen one, the Christ of God."
Even the soldiers jeered at him.
As they approached to offer him wine they called out,
"If you are King of the Jews, save yourself."
Above him there was an inscription that read,
"This is the King of the Jews."

Now one of the criminals hanging there reviled Jesus, saying,
"Are you not the Christ?
Save yourself and us."
The other, however, rebuking him, said in reply,
"Have you no fear of God,
for you are subject to the same condemnation?
And indeed, we have been condemned justly,
for the sentence we received corresponds to our crimes,
but this man has done nothing criminal."
Then he said,
"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."
He replied to him,
"Amen, I say to you,
today you will be with me in Paradise."

It was now about noon and darkness came over the whole land
until three in the afternoon
because of an eclipse of the sun.
Then the veil of the temple was torn down the middle.
Jesus cried out in a loud voice,
"Father, into your hands I commend my spirit";
and when he had said this he breathed his last.

Here all kneel and pause for a short time.

The centurion who witnessed what had happened glorified God and said,
"This man was innocent beyond doubt."
When all the people who had gathered for this spectacle saw what had happened,
they returned home beating their breasts;
but all his acquaintances stood at a distance,
including the women who had followed him from Galilee
and saw these events.

Now there was a virtuous and righteous man named Joseph who,
though he was a member of the council,
had not consented to their plan of action.
He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea
and was awaiting the kingdom of God.
He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.
After he had taken the body down,
he wrapped it in a linen cloth
and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb
in which no one had yet been buried.
It was the day of preparation,
and the sabbath was about to begin.
The women who had come from Galilee with him followed behind,
and when they had seen the tomb
and the way in which his body was laid in it,
they returned and prepared spices and perfumed oils.
Then they rested on the sabbath according to the commandment.

Exegesis

Isaiah 50:4-7

Our passage today is taken from *Deutero-Isaiah* or *Second Isaiah*. Our pericope is referred to as the third major servant song of Isaiah. It is one of four servant songs in Isaiah. The setting is the time of the Exile in Babylon. The plight of the Israelites spurs the yearning for a Messiah.

The servant song begins with Chapter 40. It belongs to a section of *Second Isaiah* that is titled *Expiation of Sin, Spiritual Liberation of Israel*. Chapter 40 is called *The Servant of the Lord*. Chapter 50 is titled *Salvation Only through the Lord's Servant*.

Chapter 50 begins as follows: "Thus says the Lord; Where is the bill of divorce with which I dismissed your mother?... It was for your sins that you were sold, for your crimes that your mother was dismissed." (Is 50: 1). The people are discerning why they are now in bondage in Babylon, why their temple and their city have been destroyed. God is assuring them that it was their adultery, their turning away from God that resulted in their current situation. Even though they have been an adulterous people, God is assuring them that there is no bill of divorce. The marriage covenant between God and His beloved is still binding. They are, however, in need of a Savior. There is a need for atonement. There is a need for healing. A Savior must rise up, one who "has not rebelled, has not turned back." (Is 50: 5).

This scripture has been chosen for Passion Sunday for obvious reasons. The details that parallel the Passion narrative are striking, this is especially remarkable considering that the words were written approximately 550 years before Christ. Like the prophets that came before, the suffering servant is being rejected by the people and treated harshly. Like Jesus his face is set like flint on the mission. This expression of a singularity of focus appears often in the prophetic tradition, e.g. Isaiah 48:4; Jer. 1:8, 18; Ezek. 3:8-9; Luke 9:51. Jesus' face is set like flint on Jerusalem. He is resolutely focused on the purpose for which He came into our world. "It is for this hour that I came." (Jn 12: 27).

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 22:8-9, 17-18, 19-20, 23-24

This Psalm is on the lips of Jesus from the Cross. (Mk 15:34) In the oral society at the time of Jesus it was customary to memorize Sacred Scripture. It was also regular practice to recite the first line of a Psalm and imply that the listener would continue the Psalm in its entirety in their own mind. It would be wise to take the time to read and meditate on the entire Psalm.

In ancient text Psalm 22 was entitled *The Prayer of an Innocent Person*. The psalm begins, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me." Jesus cries out from the Cross the words of the psalmist, "My God, My God why have you forsaken Me." The true passion is the experience of God forsakenness. It is the pain of separation from infinite love. Jesus travels to the depth of God forsakenness to save us. Real death is precisely this separation from the Father's love.

The entire psalm is full of deep emotion and passion. The Servant of the Lord must descend to a state of being that is subhuman, e.g., "But I am a worm, hardly human." (Ps 22: 6). There is a sense of dehumanization that brings about deep isolation and separation. The forces that are attacking are also subhuman, e.g., "Many bulls surround me...Many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in on me." (Ps 50: 13, 17). The forces of evil are often portrayed as subhuman beings.

The purpose of this innocent Servant of the Lord is to bring healing to the guilty and afflicted. "The poor will seek their fill: those who seek the Lord will offer praise. May your hearts enjoy life forever!" (Ps 22: 27). Psalm 22 concludes as follows: "The generation to come will be told of the Lord, that they may proclaim to a people yet unborn the deliverance (salvation) you have brought." (Ps 22: 32).

Exegesis (Continued)

Philippians 2:6-11

In his first letter to the world, *God is Love*, Pope Benedict XVI points to the Cross of Jesus and says, “This is where the definition of love must begin.” I certainly agree with that statement. In a similar vein I would point to the Cross and say, “This is where the definition of humility must begin.” This is the ultimate act of humility in human history. At its deepest level pride says, “I do not need God.” Humility is the opposite of pride and therefore humility is coming to understand our total dependence on God for our very existence. Jesus totally surrenders Himself into the arms of His Father.

Scholars believe that our scripture passage today is a common hymn of the early Church that predates St. Paul. The understanding is that St. Paul is merely reciting the hymn to communicate his point. Paul is calling on the people of Corinth to put on the heart and mind of Christ. Chapter 2 is titled, *Plea for Unity and Humility*. The hymn is set up by the immediately preceding verses.

“Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each not looking out for his own interests, but everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God...” (Phil. 2:3-5)

The word *form* in the original Greek is *morphe*. *Morphe* describes a mode of being, i.e. Jesus is divine. Our creed describes Jesus as being one substance with the Father. Yet, Jesus in an ultimate act of humility chose to be fully human without divine influence. He is God choosing to pour out His life for us, a total emptying. Psalm 22:15 describes it as follows: “Like water my life drains away...” In a similar vein Paul would later talk about being poured out like a libation. Even in death. As the side of Jesus was pierced, blood and water flowed from His side, total outpouring of life and love. St. Anselm would call this *the marvelous exchange*. He became totally human so that we might one day share divine life. Jesus had to willingly divest Himself of His divinity.

St. Paul would further describe this marvelous exchange in his second letter to the Corinthians: “For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake He became poor although He was rich, so that in His poverty you might become rich.” (2 Cor 2: 9). St. Gregory of Nyssa describes this gift as follows: “Christ emptied Himself by compressing the glory of His Godhead within our smallness. What He always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what He assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature.”¹

1. St. Gregory of Nyssa; *Against Apollinarius*.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 22:15 – 23:56

When the hour had come. The Greek word that we translate as *hour* is *hora*. Differing slightly from our English understanding, the word speaks of a specific moment in time relative to a particular event. Jesus talked about His “Hour” numerous times, especially as captured by the beloved disciple John. Jesus is referring to His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension, i.e., His passage to the Father. Jesus said, “It is for this hour that I came.” (Jn 12: 27).

The hour begins with the institution of the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharistic Table and the Cross on Calvary are one. The Body lifted up and the Blood poured out are one.

After He gave thanks. The Greek word that Luke uses for *thanks* is *eucharisteo*. At this moment of agony at what lies ahead, Jesus gives thanks to God. In the prayer of thanksgiving Jesus would have prayed the *berakah* prayer. It was the same prayer that Moses prayed at that first Passover in the desert.

He went as usual to the Mount of Olives. Luke captures the many times that Jesus went off by Himself to the Mount of Olives to commune with His Father. *He Himself withdrew about a stone’s throw away.* Recall that John also depicts Jesus going up the Mount of Olives to pray by night. When morning came, He descended the Mountain to the temple area to teach. The scribes and Pharisees brought to Him the woman caught in adultery. One by one the crowd dropped their stones and walked away. Now Jesus is standing about a stone’s throw away. Jesus is taking the woman’s place.

In the courtyard around a charcoal fire. Peter is warming himself at the fire. There he denied Jesus three times. Two weeks later, around another charcoal fire, Peter will tell Jesus three times that he loves Him. Once again God writes twice.

You are therefore the Son of God... You are saying that I AM. Unwittingly his enemies now call Jesus God by using the phrase *ego eimi, I AM*. This are the very words capturing the name of God, the exact Greek words I the LXX.

Barabbas was released in place of Jesus. We do not know much about Barabbas. We know that his name in Aramaic means *son of the father*. All of us are sons of the father and so we could conclude that we were released from bondage and death row. Jesus takes our place.

Father forgive them. Jesus began His public ministry calling us to repent and to believe in the Good News of love, mercy and forgiveness. To the very end of His earthy human life Jesus lived what He is calling us to imitate.

Today, you will be with Me in paradise. Even with the last breath of life Jesus is forgiving the sinner who turns to Him. The Greek word for *today* is *semeron*. It speaks of a special moment of revelation, a moment of salvation. The Greek word for *paradise* is *paradeisos*. This is one of only two uses in the NT. Both 2 Cor 12:4 and Rev 2:7 refer to the paradise prepared by God for the first humans (Gen 2:8), the most noteworthy feature was the “tree of life” (Gen 2:9).²

2. Luke Timothy Johnson; Sacra Pagina Series—The Gospel of Luke; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 378.

Exegesis (Continued)

Luke 22:15 – 23:56

The death of Jesus was a cosmic event in human history. The world went dark from noon until 3 p.m. Some surmise that there may have been an eclipse of the sun or a sandstorm. I see it as more of an act of God, a fulfillment of Amos 8:9, “On that day, says the Lord, I will make the sun set at midday and cover the earth in darkness in broad daylight.”

“The temple veil was rent in two from top to bottom.” The underlying Greek word for rent is *eschisthe*. It means to tear violently as one would rip an old cloth in two with one powerful force. The temple veil was a huge curtain that separated the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the temple where the ark of the covenant resided. It was built by human hands as a barrier separating the people from God. No one was allowed to enter except the High Priest that was chosen to enter once per year to offer the sacrifice of atonement. It is symbolic of God crashing through the barriers of sin and death that once separated us from God. The barrier created by human hands is destroyed by God.

I always looked at this cosmic moment as the act of God opening the gates of Heaven so that we could now enter God’s presence. In recent years I have come to see this as also the opening of the font of God’s grace in a new way. I feel that God’s love is pouring on the world as a Niagara Falls of love and mercy flowing upon us from the pierced side of Christ. Jesus said: “Whoever believes in Me, as scripture says: Rivers of living water will flow from within him.” (Jn 7:38)

Reflection

This weekend we commemorate the Passion of our Lord. The very word “passion” connotes a pain or an agony of the heart. As Jesus experiences the agony in the garden He exclaims, “My soul is sorrowful unto death.” (Mk 14:34). As painful as the physical crucifixion must have been the pain of the denial, betrayal and abandonment must have been even more excruciating for Jesus.

We all have experienced the pain of being separated from a loved one because of death. My own family and members of our parish family have recently lost a spouse or even a child to the reality of death. The human finality of that, and the heartache that accompanies that loss can be overwhelming. The pain of that separation can be immobilizing.

It seems that just yesterday we celebrated the wonder of Christmas and the coming of our Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus was born into our human condition. He walked into the waters of the Jordan River in deep solidarity with us. He becomes one of us in all things but sin. He must share in all things including death, even death on a cross. Jesus travels to the depth of God forsakenness for us. From the agony of the cross he cries out, “My God, My God why have you forsaken Me.” (Mk 15:34) In the ancient Creed of the Church, Christians proclaimed, “He descended to the depth of hell.” Jesus goes to the depth of God forsakenness for us. He experiences real death, separation from His father’s love. He becomes separated from the life-giving breath of His Father. He, through whom all things came into being, ceases to be! He humbles Himself in order to save us.

From the cross He could hear the bystanders jeer, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.” (Mk 15:30). The chief priests and the scribes mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself.” (Mk 15:31). He did not come into the world to save Himself. He came to save us! He who was without sin had no need of salvation. We sinners need a savior. Out of love for us and in obedience to the Father, Jesus remained on the cross, fastened with nails and hatred, but held there by love. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but might have eternal life.” (Jn 3:16). He humbled Himself to share in our humanity so that we may share in His divinity. We look back at the cross from the vantage point of the empty tomb and we give thanks, and we remember.

At the moment of His death the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. That which once separated us from God is destroyed forever. After three days of darkness and separation, God breathed His life breath back into His Son. The Spirit that Jesus surrendered from the cross now raises Him from the dead. Jesus breathed that Spirit on the apostles in the upper room that first Easter Sunday evening and poured it upon the Church at Pentecost. The same Spirit is now with us, the Lord and giver of Life. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Glenn".

Personal Witness

I was raised in a very devout Catholic home. The Crucifix of Jesus was everywhere including over the head of my bed. We prayed the rosary as a family and so I held the Crucifix in my hand as a very small child. In our parish there remains today a very large and graphic Crucifix over the altar. It was on the wall of our classroom in school. Jesus on the cross was very familiar to me, maybe too familiar. It was close yet it seemed something of the distant past in a far and away land.

As I reflect on my relationship with the Crucified Lord over the years I can identify two very significant spiritual awakenings. The first occurred when I was in my early thirties, before priesthood was even on my mind. I had recently lost a very close friend in an automobile accident and that sent me to search for answers. It was the middle of Lent, and I was drawn to a parish mission. The mission was being directed by three Franciscan Priests of the order of St. Maximillian Kolbe. I heard the story of Fr. Kolbe in very gruesome detail for the first time. Fr. Kolbe was the prisoner at Auschwitz that stepped forward and took another prisoner's place in the starvation bunker. The priest pointed to the crucifix over the altar while looking directly at me and said: "Did not Jesus do the same for you, did he not take your place, did he not die for you?" I literally moved from sitting to kneeling and as I did the entire congregation followed. For the first time in my life the Cross became personal! As I fell to my knees in thanksgiving, I felt this incredible regret that I had never thanked Jesus for taking my place, for taking away my sins, for dying for me.

As it were that following Holy Thursday, I was invited to have my feet washed during Mass. I thought of an excuse and declined the invitation. As I listened to the Gospel that evening the words took on new meaning for me. Peter too at first refused to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus replied, "Unless you allow me to wash your feet you will have no inheritance with me." In my head I translated that: unless you allow me to love you, unless you allow me to wash away your sins you will not share eternal life with me. This gift of salvation must become personal for each of us. Jesus is pouring out His life for us. We must accept the gift. In his Catechism Saint John Chrysostom writes: "The soldier pierced the Lord's side, he breached the wall of the sacred temple, and I have found a treasure, and I have made that treasure my own." Each one of us must make that treasure our own. The Cross must become personal.

The second major spiritual awakening that I had came during my seminary years. As we were studying the Gospel of John and covering the famous passage John 3:16, the professor was making a case that the word *gave* should be translated *gives*, *i.e.*, "God so loved the world that He *gives* His only begotten Son." He argued that the verb was active and not past tense. He also argued that the gift of God's life and love is an ongoing, every present and never-ending reality. He pointed to the Eucharist where we make present again the one sacrifice of Calvary, where His body is given up and His blood poured out. Then he pointed to all the sacraments of the Church where God's grace and mercy flows upon us.

As my personal relationship with Jesus has evolved over the years so has my vision and experience of the crucifixion. It has moved from a distant historical event to an up-close and personal gift of love. It has moved from an intellectual understanding to a personal experience of God's love. For that I am eternally grateful.

